

## **“He Missed Wednesday Night Bible Study”**

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25).

Some time ago, Paul Harvey reported of a 73-year old man who had been pinned beneath his farm tractor for four days and nights in driving rain and a terrible storm. Concerned friends went to see about him just in time. He survived the ordeal, but lost a leg below the knee. Several newspapers picked up on the story and centered on the amazing fact that a 73-year old man could live after being pinned beneath a tractor for four days and nights in such bad weather.

What is even more amazing about this news report is the reason his friends were compelled to check on him. One fellow said it best: "He missed worship services on Wednesday night!" That's all? Yes! He was always so faithful in attendance that simply missing one worship service caused his brethren to check on him. Not only should the older brother be commended for His faithfulness, but his brethren need to also be praised for their genuine concern for their brother.

### **Assembling with the Saints in the First Three Centuries By Paul R. Blake**

Psalms 133:1 - "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" 122:1 - "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

What a pleasure it is to come together for worship with God's people! What a joy it has been for us to welcome new brothers and sisters into the family of God over the years here at TR! What a treat it has been to grow in strength in this place! May the cause of Christ go ever forward in this community.

While we have grown in many ways, we must not lose sight of our need to grow in faith and faithfulness. Studying the word of God will help us to increase our faith through the knowledge of the revealed mind of the Lord. Prayer for wisdom will bring understanding and application of the truths contained in Holy Writ. Meditating on these things will develop strength and conviction within us. However, I submit to you that though we will grow by doing the above things, we will grow much faster and we will grow much closer if we do them together.

God in His infinite wisdom recognized that a man needed a lifetime companion, for it was not good for him to be alone. Therefore, God gave man a mate that would not only help him through life's trials, but this mate will also make him more than he could ever be alone. Thus it is with the church. God knew that Christians would be weak, vulnerable, incomplete and unfulfilled by themselves, so He put them together in churches. Banded together in this fashion, they are stronger and wiser than when alone. Christians as a group are made whole and complete when bound together by unity, love and fellowship. A Christian by himself becomes easy prey for the adversary.

In addition to bringing His children together in local churches for their own growth and benefit, God further admonished his children to come together often for their own protection and development. His word contains instructions for Christians to gather together as well as examples of how the first century Christians carried out those commands.

Hebrews 10:23-25 - "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised; And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Hebrews 3:12-14 "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

Acts 5:42 - "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

It is evident that the Christians in the first century heard, understood and practiced the will of the Lord in gathering together with the saints when they meet. They knew that it was for their own benefit, growth and safety to study, pray and simply spend time with each other.

Yet, while this was the practice in the first century, was faithful attendance a part of the lives of second and third century disciples? The following quotes were taken from various religious writers of that time; these men wrote about the importance of regular attendance for prayer and Bible study. While this author does not endorse all of the religious practices of the following scholars, at the same time what they have written demonstrates to us just what believers did in the first three hundred years of the church with regard to assembling with the saints.

DIDACHE: "You shall seek daily the faces of the saints in order that you may rest content with their words. You shall not make a schism, but you shall make peace between those who are fighting. You shall come together frequently and seek the things beneficial to your souls."

BARNABAS: "You are not to retire by yourself and live alone as if you were already righteous, but you are to come together in one place and seek the common good. Remember the Day of Judgment night and day, and you are to seek daily the faces of the saints."

IGNATIUS: "Let no one be deceived: unless one is within the place of sacrifice he is deprived of the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two has such great strength, how much more the prayer of the whole church? Therefore, he who does not come to the assembly is already puffed up and has passed judgment on himself. Give diligence to come together more frequently for thanksgiving and glory to God, for when you are frequently together in one place, the powers of Satan are destroyed and his destructiveness is nullified by the concord of your faith."

POLYCARP: "Let assemblies be held more frequently; seek all by name."

SECOND CLEMENT: "Rather let us come together more frequently and try to make progress in the commandments of the Lord in order that we may all be of the same mind and may be gathered together unto life."

HIPPOLYTUS: "But if there should be an instruction in the word (on that day) let each one prefer to go thither. For having prayed with the church he will be able to avoid all the evils of that day. The God-fearing man should consider it a great loss if he does not go to the place in which they give instruction. If there is a teacher there, let no one of you be late in arriving at the assembly in the place where they give instruction. Then it shall be given to him to who speaks to utter things which are profitable to all. Therefore, let each one be careful to go to the assembly to the place where the Spirit abounds." (Early Christians Speak by Everett Ferguson, 1981, p. 70)

For two hundred years after the last apostle died, believers knew that the will of the Lord was such that they should gather with other Christians when they came together for prayer and Bible study. There have been no changes in God's instructions to His children. In addition, His children still need to come together for protection, strength and growth. If it was needful for Christians to assemble faithfully for the first 300 years of the church, then it has been needful for the disciples to be faithful in assembling for the past 1700 years. It is still necessary today as well. And it will be essential tomorrow. How can devout believers and followers of Christ feel comfortable being elsewhere when the family of God comes together?